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INTRODUCTION TO PART FOUR: A SOCIO-POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE ON READING

Part Four is not an abrupt departure from the ideas presented in Part Three for all the assumptions and principles that apply to a socio-cultural take on literacy also apply to a socio-political one. However, a socio-political position on literacy or a commitment to critical literacy merits separate discussion on the grounds that it is more politically aware and more tuned into issues of power and equity. Vygotsky, hugely influential in informing the socio-cultural stance, did not foreground power relations within the social context of learning. However, scholars who took up Vygotsky's ideas and developed socio-constructivism (e.g. Bruner 1996) are more explicit in this regard.

The two scholars whose literacy philosophies appear in this part of the book not only express a socio-political perspective but are energetically developing its theory and practice in their own work. In interview Jackie Marsh said that 'literacy is embedded within discourses of power'. She said the question that exercises her as a researcher is: 'How are children's interests excluded from the curriculum and what are the processes involved in that?' Socio-cultural studies of school literacy practice discussed in the previous part of the book shed light on some of those processes – they demonstrated that classroom literacy is actually implicated in the creation of difference. The work of Carolyn Baker, Allan Luke and Peter Freebody (e.g. Baker and Luke 1991; Baker and Freebody 2001) to which Barbara Comber refers also shows how classroom practices produce advantage and disadvantage, distinction and indistinction. Barbara Comber said 'I want to be engaged with kids in questions about language and power, and this partly comes from

my own history about being concerned about kids who don't have an easy time in school'. She says 'literacy is always political'. Part Four explores literacy as a political construct.

We begin this part with transcripts from our final two scholars, Barbara Comber and Jackie Marsh. This will be followed by a discussion of some of the major ideas raised by these interviews.

BARBARA COMBER'S OBSERVATIONS, SUGGESTIONS AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Brief profile of Barbara Comber

Barbara Comber is Director of the Centre for Studies in Literacy, Policy and Learning Cultures at the University of South Australia. Her research interests include literacy development, poverty and education, teachers' work and critical literacies. She was a researcher in the '100 children go to school' longitudinal study of children's literacy development from pre-school through the first four years of schooling and also a project with the Department of Education, Training and Employment, South Australia, which documented the literacy development of socio-economically disadvantaged students in the middle primary years. She recently co-edited two books: *Negotiating Critical Literacies in Classrooms* (Falmer, 1999) with Ann Simpson and *Critiquing Whole Language and Classroom Inquiry* (NCTE, 2001) with Sibel Boran. She has an ongoing commitment to fostering teacher research and collaborative inquiries.

What follows is an edited version of the recorded telephone interview I did with Barbara in January 2002.

BARBARA COMBER (BC): This is a general response to begin with and this gives a context for what I say later. One of the things that I ask myself is 'What can be judged from one reading event and one that is a staged performance at that? I think quite a lot can be inferred in terms of performance in that practice, and it suggests hunches about what Stephen knows

and can do as a reader in those circumstances with that kind of a text. So even though we should be very aware of the limits of looking at one event like this, it does actually tell us quite a bit about what he can do in that kind of event.

My own view is that we would need multiple instances to confirm or disconfirm any hypotheses so the things that I say later are really hypotheses. Also, in my view, we would need different literacy practices so first, we would need multiple instances of that kind of event to confirm or disconfirm any hypotheses we might make about him as a reader in that kind of situation and second, we would also need to see him in different literacy practices to tell us more. The dominance of this one kind of event in early childhood education means ultimately that we tend to see only one kind of learner reader; that there is a dominant normative reader. And Stephen has had a very good go at this in my view.

The thoughts that I have now are not necessarily in any order so I will go quickly through them.

I think that who is holding the book as an indicator of who is responsible for producing the text is a really interesting thing to think about – because you intervened and I noticed it myself before that and wanted to do something about it myself. Certainly this is worth thinking about. Part of the training of Reading Recovery teachers involves them in thinking about who is responsible for producing the text and doing the reading. Holding the book is quite interesting in that regard.

It seemed to me that the teacher was concerned to maintain enjoyment of the story as a whole plus support Stephen as a student reader. I like in your proposal that what you want to do here is to think about the realities and the complexities of teaching and I wholeheartedly support that. And I think in this instance we see some of this going on. We see the tension between these twin agendas: he must orally and 'independently' perform in order to be analysed, in order to improve as a student reader and at the same time the teacher tries to make it a pleasurable event. So you can feel for her in trying to do that.

One of the other things I noticed is the shift in Stephen's body (and the teacher's) at various stages of the event, and in Stephen's case we see lots of indications – from pleasure and relaxation when he takes on the role of listener to wriggling and some discomfort as he moves to the work of the task of reading. You see some shifts in the whole body there.

His focus is very much on the operational aspects of reading – I'm using Bill Green's term now and we can come back to this later. He's focusing on what Alan Luke and Peter Freebody would call decoding and text use and to some degree the cultural (in Bill Green's terms) and what Alan Luke and Peter Freebody would call meaning making. There's little that we can see in this particular event that focuses on the critical or analytical in this instance. But then, having said that, this is also where the teacher's focus is.

I suspect he could do some analytical work. And the evidence I would point to on this is that he was looking for more at the end and I'll come back to this a little later – he was looking for more at the end of the book. And also his sense of humour showed that he had quite an understanding of the plot and in particular the role of Sophie in the story. So it seems to me he has the potential to do some analytical work.

And another thing that interested me and this is interesting for teachers and student teachers to think about – that is that dialect affects what can be heard (what I could hear). Stephen's pronunciation affected what I could hear and I was glad I had your transcript and I read it three times. I couldn't actually hear and it wasn't because it wasn't loud enough. I think this is always going on in classrooms and we're not always aware of it even when students are using their first language, and when they don't, of course, there is even more going on that we may miss. This always makes a difference but often we are unaware of it. Also his cold and the tape-recording mean that I missed some stuff and that must make a difference to teachers in classrooms, especially in ones that are highly culturally and linguistically diverse. The other thing I thought, with regard to that, and this is a top-of-the-head response – this is the whole question of health concerns in early childhood. Children often have colds and ear infections and, given that reading tends to be an oral performance and the strategies that children have tend to be phonetic, I think that this raises questions about hearing and health more broadly. This is something we looked at in our longitudinal study.

I thought the teacher interventions were interesting, her whole style, and I know the focus is not very much on her. I've been very influenced by the work of Carolyn Baker and Peter Freebody who have taken an ethnomethodological look at classroom literacy events, particularly at shared book experience. I had students who used their kind of approach and one, in particular, studied parents hearing reading. The whole time I was watching the teacher I was thinking of the ethnomethodological question – what is being accomplished here? In particular I observed that when the teacher intervenes – she points, she offers words, she whispers, and she collaborates in the sounding out process. And Stephen, well he is able to incorporate this fairly smoothly into his performance. You can tell the two of them have done this before. And Stephen knows this classroom routine as a performative event. They bring the reading off together. She scaffolds his performance to both maintain the event itself and to achieve a reading that has satisfaction pedagogically and as a pleasurable event. That whole way of seeing familiar literacy events is quite powerful.

One of the other things I thought about, and this might be as much a comment about the teacher as about Stephen, but we can only see Stephen in relation to what his teacher invites him to do. The retelling doesn't invite any analysis or interpretive work. It was reading as remembering what happened.

Just a final comment on this question about the ending of the story – there is a sense that this is a cop out/adult ending. The ending could have been discussed. There is potential for critical text analysis in this reading event. It seems to me that when Stephen turns over and they've finished that last page and he's looking for more, there were some questions that could have been asked there: what was he looking for? What did he expect at that point?

These are just the things that I wrote down having viewed the video.

KH: *What do we know about Stephen as a reader?*

BC: I think he wants to please his teacher and I think that's important. The whole reading performance is quite a lot of hard work for him. He does, nevertheless, want to please his teacher by his reading performance. In terms of the children I've watched I think we can predict that on that particular performance Stephen is going to get there without any long-term difficulty. He has difficulties but it seems he's got it sorted. Pretty soon he's not going to need much help with that kind of performance.

Some minor observations: he uses pictures to help him select the text. I would guess that he has a preference for humour (on the basis of the limited evidence available). He likes being read to: he physically involves himself as a listener, and hearer; his enjoyment is obvious, he's smiling at the humour. He is settling back in terms of the body, yet at the same time as he relaxes he attends incredibly closely to what the teacher is doing.

I thought the teacher's finger pointing was interesting. This suggests that she believes that Stephen still needs to read word by word and finger point. Now interestingly, he doesn't actually finger point, he does what Marie Clay calls voice pointing. So the teacher is still doing something that she thinks will be helpful to him and maybe that does help him but he doesn't actually finger point himself when he's holding the book. Teacher finger and voice points to encourage him to join in; she does both of those. It seems to me that this is how she is expecting him to read; she's expecting him to word-read, word by word, which in fact some of the time he does. She's also expecting him to need the crutch of the finger pointing which he doesn't, he echo reads at first – he repeats her words as she tries to get him into it.

In terms of the cueing systems, he uses the whole range of cueing systems, not always successfully. He's got a whole lot of things happening so he uses visual, semantic, picture cues, not always attending to syntactic cues. If things don't sound right he's not always correcting on that basis. When things don't make sense grammatically he tends to proceed. He also uses syllabic chunking (e.g. for the words lurches, feeding, middle, peeped) and does some sounding out. But it does seem to be more letter by letter than by syllables. He has some memory for whole words – has some sight

vocabulary. For example, he knows the words 'friends', 'school', 'wouldn't', and 'elephant'.

Interestingly he is aware of the camera, and questions of appropriateness and what is awkward to say – he gets to potty, for instance, and words that are not always said – in the presence of two female educators while being videotaped! He actually looks up to the camera when he is retelling before saying the word toilet. He gives a sideways glance to the camera and actually looks uncomfortable before he gets to say the word.

Back to his actual decoding: he has problems, like many children of his age, with common words e.g. 'she', 'where', 'the', 'behind', 'with', those kinds of function words. He's better on the content words; he has more trouble with the prepositions and pronouns, indefinite articles etc., which is not unusual. One of the things that is interesting I think is that he's reasonably confident with his strategies – words like 'deliberately' he spent quite a lot of time on and persisted, so he's got quite a lot of faith in his ability to work these out. He uses some good miscues e.g. 'track' for 'tunnel' and a few others like that where he comes up with a word that makes sense.

He sometimes gets let down by his combination of visual and phonetic approach i.e. 'birda' for 'bridge'. He got stuck around that as his strategies don't work for some words and he doesn't do what some teachers here would encourage children to do which is read that again and see if you can work it out, he doesn't read on and he doesn't read back yet. He tends to stay with the word which again is what his teacher is encouraging. She's encouraging him to go to the picture cues rather than to use a more semantic or even syntactic approach. 'Does that make sense or does that sound right?' 'You wouldn't say that, would you?' So he's not doing that yet or not in that particular episode anyway.

One of the other things – and this relates back again to the work of Carolyn Baker and Peter Freebody – one of the things I found fascinating about the teacher is the kind of whispered decoding that went on, the two of them in cohorts together, the private negotiation of the decoding. As if to say 'We're going to get this right and then we'll say it more loudly', and I think that's really interesting. That goes on in classrooms all the time and I think it's worth thinking about. What is accomplished by this practice? It's our job to perform the reading of this book and we might have a few hiccups along the way but that's between us – here are some clues, and together we will make sure that you can do it. I have seen other teachers doing something similar but never quite seen it like this – the whispering and the volume shutting you out, just between the two of us. In classrooms teachers probably do this to protect children from their peers, reading aloud involves a hell of a lot of peer judgement. There's a lot of social work going on in classrooms. Of course this is all on the basis of just one short episode, I would really need to see him again, with other teachers, with friends etc.

One of the things about the approach that I would take is that so much is produced by the social cultural context of a literacy event and it would be interesting to see Stephen in different circumstances and this is getting us to the next question.

KH: *What else would you want to know about him?*

BC: Now I could go on for days on that question. I would like to know what his preferred texts are, what he would choose to read at home and in school, and in different situations in school, and how he'd go about doing that. What other genres he'd go to in school, what kinds of books, and other texts that he might prefer to be looking at, and it may be that he would choose similar sorts of texts that he chose from that small selection that were available to him there in that event.

How does he go about reading when there's time to read in the classroom? How is he when there is time to read in the classroom? For example, does he ever volunteer to read in front of his peers?

I guess I would want to see more oral readings on different kinds of texts and different levels of difficulty. What kind of level of difficulty does this book represent for him? How might he have performed on easier and more difficult texts? I was interested in what he can do when he reads a known text, and what he might have done had he had the opportunity to reread that text or to have rehearsed reading that text silently or orally before reading it as a performance.

I would also be interested in what he can do when he reads with his peers/on his own. I found it interesting that in this particular event we didn't get a sense of what he made of this story at all, apart from the retelling in the middle. And I'm not criticizing at all as I thought that was a good idea to do that. What has he made of this story? While the performance and the completion of the text were achieved, we have no idea about what he thought was going on there.

In order to be able to say more about him as a reader I would like to see him in a whole lot more reading events. I'd want to know whether he chooses to read to his parents at home, whether they read to him, or whether reading for him is largely a school-based activity.

I would also want to look at his writing to see what he can write.

And I'm wondering about what he thinks of his reading and writing now? Whether he has some kind of self-awareness and self-assessment, whether that's something he'd be able to articulate or not I don't know. What he'd like to get better at if he was able to participate. He couldn't wait to get out the door when it was over.

Also, there's a whole lot of other things as well that I'd like to know. Having done these longitudinal studies of children, we are now kind of swimming in data, and trying to make sense of it all and obviously building

up hypotheses about children as literate people over time. So I guess this is where I'm coming from and even then we think we hardly know anything about those children, having watched them for years. We know quite a lot but there's a lot we don't know as well, I guess there are so many questions, we could go on and on.

KH: *What should his teacher do?*

BC: This is always a hard question in a way. I think it's important to start with what already has been accomplished, and really a lot has already been accomplished. He's a very willing participant in school-based reading practices as far as we can tell. He obviously likes to hear reading and she obviously reads to the class a lot. She's a good oral reader, very engaging, she'd want to keep doing some of the things that are obviously working.

She would want to continue providing him with opportunities to gain satisfaction from his reading. Some of the things she could add, and again I feel quite awkward about saying this as of course there will be lots going on that I don't know about, and these comments are based obviously on what you can see. I think opportunities to reread and rehearse reading are important. I wanted her to stop occasionally, she was so focused on getting that book read – that's partly the research as well, of course. I would like her to get him to reread sections and I wondered if she gave him opportunities to rehearse reading – he came to this very cold. There was no prediction, you know, 'I wonder what could this be about' – she probably does those kinds of things in the classroom but we didn't get to see it in that context.

I think once again there is something about that reading to the teacher, reading to the mother event that shuts out other kinds of social practices that would typically occur around reading the text, very much on the performative aspects. And there's something about miscue too, it makes visible particular kinds of reading; other kinds of reading practices become invisible. And again she may already do this but you would want him to have opportunities to read across genres and text types, to encourage more talk about what is going on in the story. I wanted to intervene myself and give him an opportunity to talk about what's happening and particularly to invite him to ask questions, to comment, to analyse. As it is it's all very unproblematic.

Because her emphasis is on appreciation and decoding – she's got those two things going together, let's appreciate the story and let's decode it – it means that interpretive work, prediction, evaluation, intertextual referencing and comparative work like 'Have we read any other books like this?' 'Have we seen any cartoons like this?' 'Have we seen any movies like this?' – none of that happened, either before, during, or after, because that's not what she's trying to accomplish in that particular event.

So, again, to go back to your question, I would want the teacher to worry less, on some occasions, about the performative aspects of the literacy event and work more on depth, what's he learning to do, what's he learning to understand. There were so many questions that could have been asked, and he might have had questions too. The obvious ones are: 'What else could have happened in this story?' 'Why might the author have finished it this way?' 'Why are books for children so often about teddy bears?' I think that the literary twist left him a bit flat really, he wanted more at the end.

These ideas are not in any particular order.

KH: *What theoretical perspectives underpin your suggestions?*

BC: One of the first things to say, having been in this game for a long time, is why I take the view that I have taken. I began as a secondary English teacher and very quickly found that many of my children couldn't read – that's how I got into the world of literacy and reading. And so I hadn't always come from the position that I come from now. It's about teachers assembling repertoires of theories and practices over time. It's a historical kind of thing, so when I discovered that a number of the children in my Year 8, Year 9 and Year 10 classes were really struggling to read their school texts, I actually went back to study myself. The kind of place I started was very much with a psycho-linguistic perspective, reading the work of Marie Clay, the Goodmans, and Margaret Meek Spencer, and many people like that. One of the things that I could have done here is to look at that event using just that knowledge. The psycho-linguistic perspective is quite helpful as you do get a sense of how it is that individual children in particular circumstances are trying to make sense, how they try to make meaning, the kind of strategies they have. I certainly don't want to throw that out.

But what that didn't do for me was give me some kind of social and political analysis of what was going on. Because I've always been concerned with the kids that don't do well in school, I've been looking for theoretical perspectives that help me understand what's going on in the case of the children who seem to be failed by schooling. I came to socio-cultural theories of literacies and more critical and political analyses of progressive literacy in the middle of my own career. I came to those perspectives almost kicking and screaming as I had wanted to believe that we could fix things for all kids by a very progressive, liberal kind of approach with a focus on individuals.

So eventually I came to think of literacy as social and cultural practice. I came to think of literacy events as accomplishments of teachers and children; of literacies as multiple and, more recently over the last decade or so, to really focus on what we could do with critical literacy which embeds those

views of literacy as social and cultural practices; the non-neutrality, non-innocence of textual practices, right from the beginning of school. I want to be engaged with kids in questions about language and power, and this partly comes from my own history about being concerned about kids who don't have an easy time in school and who don't just naturally join the literacy club, who don't become what you see Stephen in the process of becoming.

I was very influenced, and still am influenced, by the work of Shirley Brice Heath and Ann Haas Dyson – people working as ethnographers of literacy in communities and schools who were trying to work out how cultural difference makes a difference to kids in classrooms, how cultural difference might be considered a resource, not a problem. And because my own work is concerned with children who are growing up in poverty, poverty by Australian standards, I've been really interested in the work of people like Alan Luke, and the New Literacy Studies (NLS). But in a sense the NLS is kind of a bit arrogant in a way as people have been doing this work for a long time. I understand why people do this kind of naming and claiming, but many, many others have been working with these hard questions for a long time.

I know I'm circling around a bit here. I guess for me the theoretical perspectives that I've come to, which are aligned with what people would now call the New Literacy Studies, come out of my own history as a school teacher in disadvantaged schools, and as a researcher working with children growing up in poverty, and in culturally and linguistically diverse communities. It seems to me that the explanations we had for how children acquire language and literacy were unhelpful for many teachers working with many children. We felt like we were doing a bad job, or not doing it properly, or that the parents weren't doing a good enough job. These explanations didn't help us to teach better; they only helped us work out what the kid wasn't doing, what should have been happening at home.

So my own work now is overtly political in the sense that most of what we do is about trying to tell complex stories about teachers' work in disadvantaged schools. I know this is leading away from reading. I come back to stories of teachers' work in disadvantaged schools, stories of actual children growing up in actual places, with real lives that they don't leave at the gate when they go into school.

So to really work against the developmental view that is extremely normative, exclusionary and elitist – that is where I am, I guess. My own view is that there are multiple literacies across a range of domains; some of them allow you to do some things and some of them don't and the irony in all this is that early childhood is still dominated by picture book literacies. Meanwhile there are little kids with their own websites so the extremes between what children are doing seem to me to be getting greater. So the kind of work that we are doing recently suggests that a kind of linear model of literacy development is quite dangerous because while we have all

the kids and all the teachers focusing on getting all the kids through a linear model, some children are learning incredibly sophisticated literacies, that don't necessarily involve these kind of sacrosanct approaches to literacy at all. Children do not have to learn with picture books, for example. So my own view of literacy is that it is always political, it always involves socio-cultural practices and particular events, and that it is extremely possible, and, in my view, desirable, to start having conversations with very young children about representation, about author's choices and decisions about how things could have been written differently. I have written about these things in my own research.

I'm profoundly interested in what individual children are making of a situation. I love watching Stephen, and what teachers do. It is absolutely fascinating, it always is to watch kids. I'm interested in the kinds of learners that schools are producing and the kinds of textual practices and representations that children are acquiring, so it's always about that, it's about which kids are getting which literacy, and then what can they do with that.

KH: *And in turn this goes back to your interest in social justice and the notion that a major of aim of education is social justice and democracy?*

BC: Most literacy educators would say that they are committed to social justice, and most literacy policy, worldwide, has that as part of its rhetoric; most government ministers would say we need everybody to be more literate so there's not an awful lot of disagreement on that front.

KH: *Yes, but isn't it the case that for very many of those people matters of social justice and democracy follow once you become literate in a traditional sense?*

BC: Yes, we'll give you a good dose of school literacy and then you'll be able to learn about democratic processes, ethics, the political system and power. Well the thing for me is that we must not postpone that as what you can end up having – and I'm not suggesting for one minute that that is what's happening in the video – is so much routine, going through the motions of literacy events day in and day out, whether it's the Literacy Hour or shared book reading. The kids learn to perform; they may not be barking at print, they are doing something else, that need not involve a great deal of thinking. Even when they are thinking, and Stephen is thinking, his face is changing you know. What is he thinking? We have no idea. What can he articulate about that story? We have a minimal idea about that because his job is to produce the words as they are written. I find the work of Carolyn Baker and Peter Freebody on children's school books really helpful on this, about disrupting these very familiar early childhood classroom events.

I'm not unaware of the inertia and the conservatism in schools, not only in classrooms but in universities as well. We try to work with teachers who

are interested in these questions. A lot of the work is with teachers who are not comfortable because their kids are not doing well by traditional standards. One of the things happening here and in many Western countries is the realization that very few teachers can take for granted that the children sitting in front of them are going to speak English as a first language, that they will come from comfortable middle-class families with a mother and a father. Because teachers' work is changing, because the people who are sitting in front of them are changing, teachers in the schools that I work in – and they're not all receptive, I don't want to give the wrong impression – teachers are looking for ways of doing it better. They are no longer able to consider that the children in front of them are just like they were, and I think that that fundamental challenge means that some teachers are much more receptive to doing things differently.

There are two other major things that we've worked on – one is the kinds of debate between the media and popular culture and the other is the move to new technologies. What we try to do in our work is to say that we need to think differently about popular culture and that popular culture is part of what all children have access to, and about how we can work with it as a resource. So rather than believing that we can fix everything with a good dose of children's literature, we really need to think about what it is that children have as part of their cultural repertoires and cultural representations. And that's why I find Ann Dyson's work and Jackie Marsh's in the UK very, very helpful. We've worked with teachers around that and I guess what we've tried to do is think about what are the problems and challenges that teachers are facing anyway, and to think about what critical literacy or critical language awareness might offer. What extra resources it might offer them for their work? We're not denying the importance of what they're already doing.

The other space that has been quite productive is the emphasis on the new technologies. This means that teachers are having to rethink what they know, what they can do, their own competences. Whether they like it or not, it's changing and we see this as an opportunity. These are all challenges that are not going to go away. So the changing political, social, cultural and media environments that teachers are living in mean that their nostalgia for the kind of traditional literary literacy must be challenged – I think they can see that no matter how much nostalgia there might be, it's on the way out. They have to work with multilingualism, multiculturalism, global migration, global economies, and you know they're not going to do it with *Bear*. There's nothing wrong with *Bear* but it's a question of what else you would bring to that early literacy curriculum. Reading that book to his teacher is one among many things he might be doing.

I'd be lying to you if I said we have it all sussed. There is a high level of energy amongst teachers here about working with children to study language, to consider questions of language and power, to have kids working as researchers, to have kids producing multimedia texts, and I know this is

happening in the UK and other places as well. We try, as part of our agenda, to tell good news stories as well as doing the critique. While I'm committed to critical sociology and the importance of this for disrupting the taken-for-granted, I'm equally committed to critical and innovative practice so that we have images of how it might be different. We have documentaries of teachers because we believe that teachers need to be able to imagine asking different questions, having kids produce different kinds of texts.

KH: *Thank you very much, Barbara, for participating in this project, for being so generous with your time and for your detailed responses to the questions.*

JACKIE MARSH'S OBSERVATIONS, SUGGESTIONS AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Brief profile of Jackie Marsh

Jackie Marsh is a lecturer in Education at the University of Sheffield, where she teaches on the MEd in Literacy and the MA in Early Childhood Education and is involved in research degree supervision. Her research interests are focused upon the use of popular culture and media texts in the early years and primary literacy curriculum. Jackie has published a book, co-written with Elaine Millard, on this topic: *Literacy and Popular Culture: Using Children's Texts in the Classroom* (Paul Chapman/Sage, 2000). She is currently co-editing a *Handbook of Early Childhood Literacy Research*.

What follows is an edited version of the interview I did with Jackie towards the end of 2001.

KATHY HALL (KH): *What do we know about Stephen as a reader?*

JACKIE MARSH (JM): As you say, it is limited evidence, but I saw that here was a child who knew how to engage in school literacy practices and was willing to engage in those school literacy practices. He knew how books worked. He obviously responded to humour in stories. In terms of his reading skills, he was able to identify key events, he could use context cues. There's some evidence of self-monitoring in his comprehension; he knows when he doesn't get a word right at times – 'bridge' and so on. He has developed a sight vocabulary; he uses a range of cues, although not

consistently. He does use semantic, graphophonic, morpho-syntactic cues, but not in a consistent manner.

He brings his experiences or lack of experiences to the text, like any reader. So as he read peanut butter, for example, you could almost see that on his breakfast table, he was so familiar with it, whereas as he struggled with rucksack, I wondered – could he have come across a rucksack, did he know what one was?

He obviously had some difficulty with the structure of this particular narrative text in terms of the use of first person and past tense and I could see the teacher would probably perceive him as a struggling reader, someone who lacked confidence.

But I primarily saw him as a child who lacked motivation in this particular instance. I know he had a cold that day and that might have impacted on his performance, but he did not bring any enthusiasm to that task. It was a performance and, in terms of expectations, he met them. He wasn't challenging those expectations. And that's why I thought that he was a boy who conforms to school literacy practices. A number of boys give resistant readings to that sort of discourse with teachers, whereas Stephen was very compliant. There were times when he did respond to the text, particularly to the onomatopoeic words and the humour around the text. But I never really got the sense that he was fully engaged with the story.

So that's what I feel I could tell about Stephen as a reader from that evidence: someone who, I assume, would not gravitate towards the kind of picture books that were on offer to him. It was interesting to observe the way he responded at first. He looked around as if to say 'Is this all that's on offer?' And he gravitated towards the book *Funny Bones* first. I noticed that and, again, I think that's understandable in terms of what we know about young children's attraction to popular culture – *Funny Bones* looks like a comic. And then the teacher redirected him. I think she said 'What about something else?', and then because of that compliance I mentioned earlier, I think maybe he thought 'I ought to look at some of the others', and he moved on to Bear. But I think that was just because it was the nearest book to him. I don't feel that it was a considered choice, although he did spend some time looking at it; he flicked through it. He's obviously able to grasp the elements of a narrative pictorially and again I'll talk later about how I feel that may link in with his televisual literacy practices. So there are lots of positive things there and lots of skills to build on.

KH: *Thank you, Jackie. Tell me what you would like to know about Stephen.*

JM: Obviously what I'd like to know about him is what he likes to read outside the classroom and what his self-perceptions are as a reader. Indeed, does he enjoy reading? What does he read at home? Who with? How is that reading linked to his other interests, so, for example, does he play computer

games like Nintendo, watch TV and so on? How does his reading fit in with those other patterns? I'd like to know how his reading is linked to socio-cultural patterns within the home and his community. I'd like to know much more about Stephen as a reader in terms of how he perceives reading within his world, what he perceives are the meanings attached to the practices of reading. We got one view of Stephen – seeing reading as a school practice, in which he did certain things and responded in certain ways to the teacher. I'd like to know much more about how he engages with reading outside those schooled literacy practices. I think that they're the key things that I'd like to know about Stephen.

I'd like to know about his reading history as well – whether he was more oriented towards those school texts in the past and whether he became less so as he went through school. I'd like to know what he was offered in terms of texts throughout his early schooling and what the affordances of those texts were for him, whether any of those texts reflected his own socio-cultural literacy practices and, if they didn't, whether that contributed to his alienation from school literacy practices. I'm only talking about alienation in terms of what I observed, which was this tendency towards conformity and not enthusiasm. I know I'm making huge assumptions here; it could be that he just wasn't in great form that day. But it seemed to me that here was a boy who perhaps had not seen himself reflected in the texts on offer and that this had contributed to his disengagement with reading as a pleasurable activity.

I'd also like to know about his reading within the classroom: when he chooses to read, if indeed he does; whether it is a social practice; whether it involves sharing texts with other children, and particularly boys. I'd like to know whether he engages with gendered structures of literacy practices within the classroom, and how far he has developed a community of readers with other children in the class; whether they talk about and share texts. Those are the kinds of things I'd like to know more about.

KH: *Can I ask you to explain a little more about gendered structures of literacy practices.*

JM: It is based on the work of people like Elaine Millard and others who have demonstrated how literacy is a differently gendered practice. So within a classroom, often girls are more oriented towards the teacherly texts that teachers present through shared reading – 'quality' picture books and so on. And it has been demonstrated that some boys are not as oriented towards those kinds of texts and prefer non-fiction texts, comics and magazines. That's in terms of reading. And obviously in terms of writing, evidence shows that again boys are less likely to be motivated and oriented towards writing practices within the classroom, and that they find it more of a struggle and less of an incentive in terms of what they get out

of school. I would like to know how far Stephen fitted some of those patterns.

However, critiquing that discourse, it's not all boys who underachieve; there are some boys who are heavily oriented towards school literacy practices. I actually think that, although we need to incorporate the interests of boys within the curriculum, it shouldn't be at the expense of some of those other texts which we know have lots to offer and can orientate them towards the discourses of power that they need to access in order to achieve success. I don't think I would be suggesting that we should flood the classroom with football texts, for example. I think that we should have a more balanced approach and use the cultural interests of all children, both boys and girls, as I think girls' out-of-school practices are often as much excluded as boys' are. So we need to find a way that these texts can be appropriated – what Deborah Hicks, Kris Gutierrez and others call the development of 'hybrid pedagogical discourses'. When I recently read a paper by Deborah Hicks, *Literacies and Masculinities in the Life of a Young Working-Class Boy*, which describes how an American working-class boy's home literacy experiences are not reflected in the school curriculum, I thought of Stephen.

KH: *Are you happy to move on now, Jackie? Can we move on to talk about what his teacher might do to advance him as a reader?*

JM: The teacher should develop his motivation and confidence in reading and I think that can be done primarily by finding out what he enjoys, what his literacy practices are outside school, what he does in those hidden gaps in the classroom, times when he's not observed, like break-times and wet play times. What texts is he oriented towards then? What books does he have at home?

One of the first things his teacher could do is ask him to keep a literacy diary of his reading, so getting a sense of what his reading practices are over a number of weeks, establishing what he reads, who he reads with and how he reads, to ascertain how Stephen situates reading within his life. Then, I would suggest that his teacher should incorporate those texts as far as possible into the literacy curriculum. Let him bring texts from home to read for and with other children, make tapes of those particular texts. Also the teacher should provide books within the classroom environment that resonate with Stephen's interests.

Within the literacy diary, Stephen should document his reading of television texts, not just print-based texts, but also television and computer games, as they make a contribution to the reading diet. The classroom could then start to reflect some of those wider interests, so computer games, magazines and so on could be part of his reading in school.

A school that I worked with had a very good home-school comic library. As well as taking home a reading book on a weekly basis, children took

home comics and that was really successful in orientating boys like Stephen, who were demotivated by the literacy diet on offer, towards reading. It did have spin-offs in that the children began to read more widely across the curriculum.

So, his teacher could enhance his motivation towards school literacy practices by opening out some of the areas away from school discourses towards popular discourses. For example, the teacher could have a book corner based on a theme from *Star Wars*. One school has used a successful 'boy zone' reading area. Again, I would be wary of that. I would like to see a 'boy zone' and a 'girl zone', but I wouldn't want to have children just gravitate towards those gendered discourses without challenging them. Barbara Comber's work on critical literacy shows that we need to get children to critically analyse those discourses of power in the texts that they encounter.

And so whilst I think practices that are aimed at specific genders are useful as a starting point, I think that's all they should be – a starting point – and then they should be moved on to challenge those discourses.

So, those are the strategies I would suggest – for this particular child, basically, bring popular culture and media into the curriculum. Also, don't just make those choices on offer throughout the classroom, but have them centrally embedded within the delivery of the curriculum. This gives those texts agency and it lets children know they have some value within the school and the school literacy curriculum. It gives the texts power if the teacher uses them. For example, in shared reading and writing, comics could be used and teachers could draw from the children's knowledge of television discourses in discussions. However, I don't mean this should just take place within the context of a session which focuses on comparing a book to a film, as often happens. I think that is very valuable and is very safe for teachers who are not very confident with television texts. But all that does is to emphasize the primacy of the written text and I think there are times when we should move towards just focusing on those television practices that the children encounter outside school. For example, you can use the latest game on Playstation within a shared reading session and you can talk about the narrative structure of that game – what is the narrative structure, how do you move from one level to the next, what is the role of the central character within that computer game and so on. So it's a two-pronged strategy – providing those opportunities in the classroom, but also embedding them in the curriculum.

Another thing that the teacher should do is become familiar with the texts that children encounter outside school. We often make assumptions about those comics and magazines and yet they are very challenging as reading texts. If you look at the range of visual cues children have to navigate, at the page layout and so on, they are actually very complex texts. We need to look at the affordances of those popular culture and media texts and understand

what the pleasures are for children. Teachers might also want to challenge the gendered, the sexist and racist nature of some of the texts, but spending time on what children are actually engaged with, rather than making assumptions about those texts, would be profitable.

KH: *Did the project you mentioned, Jackie, promote their self-confidence and sense of engagement?*

JM: Yes, with certain children – mainly boys, although I haven't reported on that element of the project. Boys within that project did improve in that classroom, they became more motivated. Teachers talked about it having a big impact on motivating children towards reading. It definitely facilitated their entrance into the literacy club that Smith talks about, when there might have been many barriers to that entrance previously.

KH: *The final question I'd like to explore with you concerns your own theoretical perspective on reading. You've been alluding to it all along really, but can we talk about that more specifically now.*

JM: Primarily, I base my work on a theoretical perspective that sees literacy as a socially situated practice. Barton and Hamilton's work or Street's work outline how literacy is not a set of discrete skills; it is not autonomous. It's powerfully situated within social contexts and is socially constructed. The critical literacy discourse has also been very important – the work of Luke and Lankshear demonstrates that literacy is embedded within discourses of power; it's not a neutral technology. So that has been very important to me in tracing how that works and operates within early years classrooms. How are children's interests excluded from the curriculum and what are the processes involved in that? That's really been a key thrust of my work so far.

Also central to it is Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital' – that notion that it is only some children's cultural capital that is reflected within the curriculum, generally middle-class children's cultural capital. A lot of my work has been predicated on the notion that, by recognizing the texts that are embedded within children's daily lives, you are providing them with some recognition of the cultural capital within their world. And that's not a simplistic notion that suggests that process will suddenly empower them to succeed within the education system. But I do think that self-esteem is at the root of our learning. Self-esteem is built on how far we can see ourselves reflected in the eyes of others, and on the walls of the environments we inhabit. I do think that Bourdieu's work has been important in that respect.

In terms of looking at how a curriculum is framed, Bernstein's work on classification and framing has been important. Again I'd want to critique a

simplistic cultural reproduction model. I think, for me, his concepts are important, especially if we think of the NLS – his notion that once you have strong classification of what counts as knowledge and strong framing in terms of how that knowledge is delivered, there is less chance for those literacy practices that are situated outside school to embed themselves within the curriculum.

In terms of looking at the importance of media texts in children's lives, Anne Haas Dyson's work has been key to that. She examines how children recontextualize and reconfigure the cultural worlds in school to develop those hybrid literacy practices that are meaningful to them, but do take on some of the school literacy discourse. I think her work is central in developing our understanding of that process. I think Muriel Robinson's book on children's reading of televised narratives has also been influential and has developed our understanding of how reading practices, in terms of reading printed and televised texts, are very similar in some ways, for example in developing understanding of narrative and narrative structures, the role of characters within those narratives and so on. David Buckingham's work on the place of media texts within children's lives, how those texts create meaning for children and create communities of readers around media texts, has also been influential.

I think the work of Kress is very important. What Kress has done is show how the changing landscape of communication impacts on the literacy curriculum. His work has developed our sense of how the visual and iconic have become central to the literacy texts that children encounter through the medium of popular culture and outlines how schools have been rather slow to recognize that changing landscape of communication. The school still hangs onto the printed text as the primary form of communication.

And looking at the work on gendered literacy practices, the work of Elaine Millard, Pam Gilbert, Nora Allaway – that has given us insights into how literacy practices are situated within gendered discourses and how girls and boys often have different trajectories in relation to literacy development. There are difficulties too around that discourse, as it has often been taken over by people who have wanted to trumpet boys' underachievement, without looking in more complex ways at what's going on.

KH: *To what extent do you think teachers could incorporate critical literacy including work with televised texts within the current policy of the National Literacy Strategy?*

JM: Well I think it's easy if certain conditions are in place. It really depends on school culture and teacher confidence. But I think that if a school is willing to look more broadly at notions of literacy and is willing to engage with children's out of school literacy practices in order to see how they can

motivate children, then that can facilitate a movement into the use of televisual texts. I think that if teachers can have guidance and information about children's televisual texts, it can develop their confidence. I have lots of examples of teachers embedding popular culture and televisual texts within the National Literacy Strategy – at shared reading level, shared writing level, group work level, plenary session and so on, so it obviously can be done.

KH: *Can you give me an example of what you mean there?*

JM: Yes, Elaine Millard and I documented that in the book *Literacy and Popular Culture*. For example, some classes have used a big comic in shared reading sessions – that is, an enlarged text comic. Teachers have also used pop songs and rhymes to develop children's phonological awareness. They have looked at the patterned rhymes within those pop songs, or rap, within the classroom.

A very successful session that I saw involved a teacher sharing a Pokemon game in a shared reading session and they looked at it on the screen, they talked about the game, the rules of the game, the narrative structure of the game, the characters in it, and then the children developed and planned their own game on paper – they hadn't the software at the time to develop a computer game using the computer – but they planned a computer game. This particular teacher was looking at the genre of instructional texts and focused mainly on children developing instructions for that Pokemon game. This is a very simple example of how the instructional genre can be embedded into children's popular cultural interests. It motivated them towards that particular task. The work of Dyson has been important for showing us how it is this kind of activity that can provide a bridge to canonized literacy practices – so work on Batman can lead to work on Greek myths and legends, for example.

Part of my PhD work is about looking at what prevents student teachers from using popular culture in the classroom and the key thing that prevents them is a discourse within a school that suggests that 'Oh, that's taboo, we don't do that sort of thing here, it's so full of sexism and racism', so instead of finding ways of working round that, that is the biggest thing that's stopping them. The other factors are a lack of confidence and lack of knowledge of those texts. Teachers are very busy and it's easier to work with texts that you are familiar with and that are part of your training and maybe your own experience of growing up, but it's less easy to draw from texts that you are less familiar with.

KH: *Many thanks, Jackie. I very much appreciate your contribution.*

READING THE WORD AND THE WORLD

Introduction

This part of the book explains and discusses some issues in a socio-political approach to literacy, drawing on the suggestions and theoretical issues identified by our two scholars, not only in the transcripts here, but also in their extensive publications. Much of this part consists of illustrative classroom examples of critical literacy – from Australia, the US, and England. These examples facilitate an exploration of several themes, namely, the connection between literacy and power, being a text critic, the use of popular culture in the classroom, and the status of critical literacy in practice.

What has literacy got to do with power?

There is no neat consensus about what critical literacy is although there is broad agreement about its aims. Critical literacy challenges inequities in society and it promotes social justice and a strong or participatory democracy, the kind of democracy where power is with, not just some people (like special interest groups or the wealthy) but all people. As Powell *et al.* (2001) point out, though, equity does not mean the realization of individual personal interest; rather it means that everyone has a role in deciding what is best for the common good. A strong democracy on these terms involves collaboration and compromise. Barbara Comber says in interview that 'most

literacy educators would say that they are committed to social justice, and most literacy policy, worldwide, has that as part of its rhetoric.

A socio-political view of literacy takes it that no knowledge is neutral but rather is always based on some group's perception of reality and on some group's perspective of what is important to know. On this basis those subscribing to a socio-political view of literacy, or a critical literacy, hold that learning to read includes being able to determine underlying assumptions and hidden biases in texts. This is how literacy and power connect. Taking a critical stance requires that issues of equity come to the fore, so questions like the following become prominent in classrooms that foster critical literacy:

- What images of and ideas about, say, race, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic class, disability are on offer in the text?
- Whose interests are being served by the text?
- Whose voices are included and excluded?

What this approach does is to help learners understand how texts have power, how that power is exercised in a given text, how it works to privilege particular knowledges, beliefs, attitudes and values, and to marginalize or silence others. It is an approach that asks learners to question taken-for-granted or 'natural' assumptions about the world. It is based on the assumption that language reflects the way the world is and the world is to some extent the way it is because of the way our language is. As Morgan *et al.* (1996: 9) note, the word and the world 'each shapes and constrains the other'. So reading involves not just reading the words but reading the world as well (Freire and Macedo 1987). Critical literacy is about making explicit the relationship between 'the word' as in language and 'the world' as in the reality we live and how we understand that world to be. This is how Morgan *et al.* (1996: 9) explain what critical literacy is about: 'Critical literacy is concerned with enabling us to take particular texts and explore the ways in which these texts are implicated in making the world the way it is; in helping us to keep the world the way it is; and in 'coercing' us to see the world in certain ways rather than others.'

With reference to the text–reader relationship earlier in the book I raised the question of where meaning lies. This was in a discussion in Part Two bearing on what the reader brings to the text in terms of preconceptions, prior experience and so on. I want to elaborate now on more implicit meanings that texts and literacy events carry in order to highlight further the relationship between literacy and power. An insight made available through socio-linguistics and through the notion that reading is a social process is helpful here (and is relevant to the discussion below about readers as text analysts). This is a dimension of reading that Bloome (1993) calls 'author–reader interaction'. In any text, he suggests, the author sets up a social relationship with the reader and structures identities for him or

herself and for the reader. To do this the author may use particular linguistic devices like commands ('Stop and read the previous section'), pronouns signifying inclusion or exclusion ('we', 'I', 'you', 'them'), as well as linguistic tactics bearing on sentence structure, dialect, tone and genre. The author also establishes an identity for her or himself, perhaps as storyteller, expert, friend, fan, reporter. There may be indications of the author's gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status etc. The author's social identity inscribed in the text is known as the 'author-in-the-text' (Bloome 1993). The 'reader-in-the-text' is also positioned, perhaps as child, colleague, adult, expert etc. The 'reader-in-the-text' may be assumed to be a particular gender, from a particular ethnic group or from a particular social class background, class background and so on. Bloome notes that such positionings are not givens; they depend on the reader's interpretation of the linguistic features used and on the reading event itself. Such positionings, in other words, can be disrupted, challenged, accepted or resisted. There are other assumptions too – assumptions about the way the world is which may not be shared by all groups in society. All these assumptions can be made explicit and challenged.

A second important insight is that social relationships are always established during a reading event and this point has already been made in Part Three of the book but it is worth emphasizing here. Bloome explains how participation may include ascribing social identities and status to oneself and to others, allocating rights and privileges to talk, to engage in other activities. Through their social interactions with each other and with the text, teachers and pupils in a classroom define each other as 'teacher', 'pupil', and allocate rights and obligations for how they are to behave and how they are to interpret the text. Through a close examination of classroom interaction, my own work in a multi-ethnic literacy class documents how teacher and pupils defined each other in various ways (Hall 2002). It shows how one pupil managed occasionally to subvert the teacher's strong positioning of him and of others in the class by using a variety of linguistic devices to change the conventional pattern of identities available to learners. Like other work in this tradition, the study illuminates how pedagogical discourse shapes learning opportunities in literacy, how there is scope for individual children to make an impact, to shape events, to negotiate roles and expectations so that pupils and teacher jointly construct the contexts in which they work.

Critical literacy seeks to make explicit the various positionings and identities that are on offer in texts but that are mostly left implicit and taken for granted. Learning literacy then is about understanding how attitudes and beliefs about the world are manipulated by language. Understanding how one writes to position oneself and others and how one is positioned by a text to view the world is a prerequisite to developing other possibilities or opposing interpretations. It is worth noting here, however, that the purpose

of a critical literacy orientation is not merely to help learners appreciate that texts can be manipulative or stereotype people. While this is part of the process, critical literacy is essentially about understanding how texts work to achieve certain effects. A critical literacy classroom involves teachers and pupils working together to see how texts construct their worlds, their cultures and their communities. In addition, it involves reworking or using those texts to reconstruct different worlds, worlds that are more equitable and fair (Comber 2001).

Learning to read in this perspective is as much about learning identities and values as it is about learning skills and codes. Powell *et al.* say that literacy teachers can either teach literacy as a series of skills and codes or they can teach it 'as if the words matter' (2001: 780). The point here is that it's not a matter of some methods working and others not working since they all work to create different literacies and different literate repertoires in classrooms. Rather, literacy teaching is ultimately about the kind of literate person that is, could and should be constructed. Unlike, say, the stance on reading discussed in the first two parts of the book, critical literacy goes beyond providing authentic purposes and audiences for literacy. Its emphasis on the power-literacy relationship and on raising awareness about equity and social justice often leads to social action – in other words, literacy has transformative potential in a democratic society. Good examples of such work can be found in Comber *et al.* (2001) and Powell *et al.* (2001).

The kind of literate persons that are envisaged are citizens who

- are able to analyse texts for their implicit, taken-for-granted assumptions about the way the world is and ought to be;
- challenge the identities that texts offer when they run counter to principles of fairness and equity; and
- use their literacy to make a difference to their world.

Is literacy empowering? Why critical literacy?

In interview, Barbara Comber said that earlier in her career she had wanted to believe that we could 'fix things for all kids by a very progressive, liberal kind of approach with a focus on individuals' – much like the approach discussed in Part One above. She said she came 'kicking and screaming' to socio-cultural and socio-political perspectives on literacy. In mid-career her thinking on literacy shifted to take account of the way power and literacy are intertwined. And as she observes herself (Comber 1999), in the 1980s and 1990s some critical educators began to argue that progressive literacy pedagogies (the kind described in Part One of this book) were actually (re)producing injustices by privileging particular forms of texts, language practices and tastes and, at the same time, excluding others. For me one of

the most salient ideas underlying my own recognition of this is that literacy is indeed a 'double-edged sword' (Green 2001: 8). This is so in the sense that literacy can be liberating or dominating.

The double-sided nature of literacy is a theme that crops up in socio-political accounts. According to Pam Green (2001) there is a duality about literacy. If, for instance, school texts are limited to portrayals of the world from a mainstream perspective or if school literacy is reduced to the completion of worksheets or copying, then literacy cannot be considered liberating. Drawing on Alan Luke, she suggests that while being able to construct meaning from print may seem empowering, it may open up the potential for one's exploitation – 'You may just become literate enough to get yourself badly in debt, exploited and locked out' (Luke, cited in Green 2001: 8).

The point is that literacy is not necessarily empowering or liberating and it could be exploitative. Whether or not literacy is empowering depends on many factors. Pam Green claims that while taking a critical stance on literacy may unpack the power base of society, it may not necessarily provide the learner with access to that power base. However, she says that while achieving literacy does not earn one access to the power base of society, those who are powerful are usually literate. Being critically literate does not give any guarantees of empowerment either. As Luke (cited in Green 2001: 11) says, 'Having it [literacy] doesn't guarantee anything, but not having it systematically excludes one from cultural and economic power'. It is reasonable to conclude, however, that a teaching practice that makes explicit the workings of power and ideology has a much better chance of empowering people than a literacy which does not do this (Kempe 2001).

This is a crucial point, I think, as it reminds us that it is not so much what literacy is that is so important but what literacy *does* that is key. Margaret Meek has argued that the great divide in literacy is not between those who can and can't read but between those who have and haven't worked out what kinds of literacy society really values and how to show literacy competences in ways that gain affirmation and recognition. The work of Scribner and Cole (1981), for example, demonstrated that literacy *per se* does not necessarily lead to cognitive growth and development; that what matters is not literacy as an isolated skill, but the social practices into which people are enculturated or apprenticed as members of a specific social group.

And the social practices into which different children are apprenticed probably varies more now than ever in the past. Barbara Comber remarked that 'there are little kids with their own websites so the extremes between what children are doing seem to me to be getting greater'. Some of the research reviewed in Part Three showed that even within the same class different children are offered vastly different literacy and learning experiences, some of which could not be described as liberating.

Critical text analysis: classroom practice

What does a socio-political perspective on literacy entail in terms of classroom practice? Jackie Marsh said Stephen probably didn't see himself reflected in the texts on offer and that this had contributed to his probable disengagement with reading as a pleasurable activity. Barbara Comber would encourage a lot more analysis of texts, and in her view this one event of Stephen reading and retelling to his teacher had the potential for critical text analysis. This, she suggests, might have been encouraged in the observed event through questions like the following:

- Have we read any other books like this?
- Have we seen any cartoons like this?
- Have we seen any movies like this?
- What else could have happened in this story?
- Why might the author have finished it this way?
- Why are books for children so often about teddy bears?

Barbara (and Teresa Grainger) observed that the retelling didn't encourage any textual analysis. What was important was remembering what happened and being able to retell it to the teacher. Left unanswered for Barbara was the key question, 'What has he made of this story?'. Now it is important to emphasize that the scholars recognized that this was but one event, and a very artificial one at that, one that was highly constrained by the context of video-recording and the demands of the miscue itself. As Barbara said '[A miscue activity] makes visible particular kinds of reading; other kinds of reading practices become invisible'. Similarly, David Wray said a miscue analysis gives only a partial picture of reading.

In this section I will describe what critical text analysis means and outline some examples from classroom practice.

Luke and Freebody (1999; and Luke 2000) talk about 'families of practices' involving four types of reading competence. Learners can be described as:

- 1 *Code breakers* (How do I crack this text? How does it work? What are its patterns and conventions? How do the sounds and the marks relate, singly and in combinations?).
- 2 *Meaning makers* (How do the ideas represented in the text string together? What cultural resources can be brought to bear on the text? What are the cultural meanings and possible readings that can be constructed from this text?).
- 3 *Text users* (How do the uses of this text shape its composition? What do I do with this text, here and now? What will others do with it? What are my options and alternatives?).
- 4 *Text critics* (What kind of person, with what interests and values, could both write and read this naively and unproblematically? What is this text

trying to do to me? In whose interests? Which positions, voices, and interests are at play? Which are silent and absent?).

Each one, they suggest, is best thought of as a family of practices to emphasize their dynamic, fluid and changing nature as well as to stress the fact that they are undertaken by people in social contexts. For example, constructing meaning of a particular text might count for different things in different settings – it might count for something in the classroom and for something far more or less in a given workplace. They add that this point becomes more of an issue each day, as we encounter unprecedented hybrid multimedia texts.

They argue that, while each family of practices is necessary for literacy in new conditions (cf. technological literacies), none on its own is sufficient for literate citizens. Luke and Freebody (1999) advise that they should be seen as 'inclusive . . . with each being necessary but not sufficient for the achievement of the others'.

Alan Luke suggests that this model provides a useful framework for weighing up and questioning the emphases of current classroom literacy curricula. Perhaps there is an exclusive emphasis on the code aspect with virtually no attention devoted to critical aspects or that the literature-rich programme which is on offer in a classroom neglects the user aspect – the application and pragmatic aspect. Or it could be that the emphasis on the critical work is such that acquisition of the basic textual codes is neglected. In my view this is an extremely helpful model to interrogate literacy policy and practice, at both the level of the school/classroom and a national or regional level.

It is in the fourth family of practices that the scope for critical literacy particularly lies. The role of text analyst or text critic entails pupils coming up with alternative readings of a text through considering such questions as:

- What is being portrayed as natural?
- Who is in power?
- What emotions are attached to the participants?
- Who or what is left out of the text?
- Who plays an active role? Who doesn't?

Pupils in a critical literacy class are encouraged to reread and rewrite texts from different and multiple perspectives.

Illustrative examples: teaching strategies

Barbara Comber's research features many examples of critical literacy in action. I will describe just one of her examples, based on the ideas discussed above, to illustrate how very young children (ranging in age from 5 to 8 years old) can engage in text analysis. This example is based on the work of

Jennifer O'Brien, a primary teacher in a suburban, disadvantaged school in South Australia (Comber 2001). This teacher typically problematizes the fiction and non-fiction texts that she reads to her pupils and the texts that they read themselves. This means that she encourages her pupils to consider the versions of reality that are presented in the texts and to construct other possible versions of reality, i.e. other possible types of mothers, fathers, boys, girls, foxes, pigs etc. So the children in Jennifer O'Brien's class, some of whom were not yet able to decode, were already beginning to question taken-for-granted or 'natural' representations of the world. They were asked to 'disrupt' the realities presented to them by doing such tasks as the following (Comber 2001: 94):

Draw a witch like the one in the story.
Draw a different witch.

Draw the mean characters in the story.
Draw different mean characters.

They similarly scrutinized non-fiction texts. For example, they examined junk mail and Mother's Day catalogues. Their teacher encouraged them to record and reflect on their reading through the following:

Draw and label six presents for mothers you expect to see in Mother's Day catalogues.

Draw and label some presents you wouldn't expect to find in Mother's Day catalogues.

What groups of people get the most out of Mother's Day?

Having studied the catalogues they were asked to:

Draw and label six kinds of presents you can find in Mother's Day catalogues.

Make two lists: how the mothers in the catalogues are like real mothers; how the mothers in the catalogues aren't like real mothers.

Make a new Mother's Day catalogue full of fun things.

These children were learning what the purpose of the junk mail was, that it was designed to sell products, and that this in turn influenced the way people and things were presented in those particular texts. They were learning that a text is constructed to represent a particular reality, one that may differ from their experience of the world, one that could be different.

An example from an upper primary context used gender as a vehicle for introducing pupils to the non-neutral nature of texts. An Australian primary teacher collaborated with a researcher, Ann Kempe (detailed in Kempe 2001), and together they devised a range of literacy teaching strategies to

explore gender issues. They selected gender for two reasons – first because they reckoned it was an issue primary children can readily relate to and second, because gender is so often considered merely a peripheral issue in the curriculum rather than integrated into it.

They wanted pupils to compare and contrast texts in order to highlight them as crafted pieces. Hence they chose conventional and unconventional texts across a range of genres, from different periods of time and from different ideological perspectives. For example, they compared traditional and modern fairy tales. They compared unconventional and conventional texts to examine how this opens up multiple readings. They examined the roles and relationships given to girls and boys in reading scheme material. They rewrote stories from outdated readers. They constructed alternative endings in order to challenge dominant readings.

In addition, the pupils were encouraged to become aware of their own reading practices through such questions as (Kempe 2001: 45):

- What are you thinking about, or feeling while you are reading? How are those thoughts and feelings influenced by your background, your experiences with other texts you have read?
- What is the text asking you to think or feel? Do you agree with the point of view offered by the text? Why or why not?
- What events or points of view might have been left out of the text? Would you have left them out? Why or why not?

Such strategies assist learners begin to address the question 'Why are things the way they are?', and thus challenge the inequalities of the status quo.

Teachers in this country will be familiar with some of the new versions of old tales where the roles have been reconstructed to ones where the characters themselves are aware of their own social positioning. Excellent examples include *Snow White in New York* (French 1990) and *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* (Scieszka 1999). These new versions help to expose how identities and roles are socially created. With particular reference to gender roles and identities, fairy tales became the focus of much feminist writing because of its perceived function of acculturating young girls into passive sexual and social roles (Cranny-Francis 1990, 1993). Writers such as Angela Carter and Tanith Lee created different versions of the tales, changing the female roles from ones where their only value was their physical appearance to one where they became active in determining their own fate. *The Bloody Chamber* by Angela Carter offers different versions of 'Bluebeard', 'Red Riding Hood' and 'Beauty and the Beast' while *Red as Blood or Tales from the Sisters Grimm* retells 'Cinderella', 'Red Riding Hood' and 'The Pied Piper of Hamelin'. The purpose of all these retellings is not to replace the traditional tale but to expose their patriarchal, taken-for-granted assumptions and their particular constructions of femininity (Cranny-Francis 1993).

When should critical literacy start and what about the pleasure of reading?

Barbara Comber's response to the evidence on Stephen clearly testifies to her belief that he is capable of text analysis. Several times she talked about what the story meant to him, what he made of it, how he expected more at the end and so on. In her writings she also argues that children – far younger than Stephen – are capable of critical literacy practices. Her logic here is persuasive. She points to the amazing linguistic achievement of young children, how linguists and developmental psychologists have been fascinated by the way young children acquire not just one language, but often several languages. Therefore, it should not be surprising, she says, that young children can analyse texts critically:

It is not cognitively, nor linguistically 'beyond them'; text analysis is a dimension of the practice, not an added layer. Just as we have held high expectations for all children to learn language, in the same way we need to credit them with the competence for understanding the specific effects of language use in specific sites.

(Comber, in press)

Moreover, she argues that critical literacy is not 'a developmental milestone, nor an optional extra for gifted students'. Rather she sees it as a diversity of essential practices that can be learned while children are learning, say, the alphabetic code. She says: 'As they come to learn how texts work they can also investigate how texts work in the world.' Furthermore, even very young children are highly aware of fairness, justice and equity and their opposites. It is naïve, she suggests, to consider children as innocent and incapable or unaware of power in the world. They learn about power in everyday contexts and they learn to use language in the context of power relationships with families, peers etc. (Comber, in press).

Several scholars who were interviewed for this book wanted to know what Stephen thought reading was for. Learning what reading is for is an early acquisition and, although home is influential here, learning what reading is for is very much to do with school experience. This is how Barbara Comber puts the case for critical literacy in the early years of school:

Early childhood is a crucial site of practice because it is during that period that children form initial relationships with schooling and formal learning; it is there where they are first constituted as learners and there where most children are first constituted as readers.

Some years ago, while making the case for critical literacy in the early years of school, I wondered about the extent to which a socio-political approach in the form of problematizing texts might take the joy out of learning (Hall 1998). How, for example, would text analysis of the kind outlined above

interfere with children's enjoyment of a story? However, it seems that such fears are unfounded for the available evidence demonstrates that children enjoy sharing different readings of familiar stories, that they are in fact emotionally and intellectually engaged by critical questions that make them deconstruct and reconstruct texts in different ways. Such work connects with their interests not least because they are always motivated by issues of fairness and 'having a go'.

On the basis of her observational evidence of many teachers involving children in critical analysis of texts, Barbara Comber (in press) wrote: 'I have noticed a heightened sense of energy and pleasure [on the part of children]. When she was a class teacher, Barbara used to share and discuss with her pupils cartoons from newspapers, comics, birthday cards, and children's literature with a feminist stance. She used to collect irreverent post cards, jokes and so on and discuss with the class what it was that made these funny. In her experience young people showed a sophisticated understanding of the way language works to make a point (Comber, in press). As already noted above, the purpose of critical literacy is to help pupils understand how texts achieve their effects, not just to spot when a text is or is not politically correct. The work of feminist teacher Jennifer O'Brien (cited in Comber 2001) is especially interesting in this regard since she is careful not to train her pupils in political correctness. Her pupils are encouraged to examine all texts critically and she frequently invites her pupils to disrupt politically correct stories. She does this to emphasize the decision making involved in producing a text.

Funds of knowledge again: popular culture in the classroom

I have already said how socio-cultural and socio-political perspectives on literacy are closely connected. Indeed, the examples of practice discussed in Part Three, e.g. Kathy Au's work in Hawaii, fit equally well within a socio-political perspective. Much of this work emphasizes children's interests and their home and community resources – Moll's notion of 'funds of knowledge' being a good example.

Jackie Marsh talked about some children's and families' 'cultural capital' not being reflected in the curriculum and how her own work with families and classrooms is based on a recognition of the significance of the texts that are embedded within the children's daily lives. For many children, she says, the use of popular culture in the classroom can be a valuable way of recognizing the cultural capital within their world. Jackie's reference to the importance of a child's self-esteem in learning urges teachers to see the social experience the child already possesses as valid and significant. David Wray similarly emphasized this – he talked about the need for school tasks to match 'the kinds of worlds that they mentally inhabit themselves'. These

scholars' suggestion is that Stephen's social experience should be reflected back to him as being valid and significant. But it can only be reflected back to him if it is part of the texture of the learning experience created in his classroom.

Given how pervasive popular culture is in the lives of all children, its use in the classroom seems eminently sensible. Some popular texts, e.g. comics, attract greater numbers of boys than girls and greater numbers of working-class children than middle-class children, thus highlighting their potential to extend the literacy skills of groups in society that are often described as underachieving in literacy. Unfortunately teachers are often reluctant to incorporate popular media into the reading material of the classroom, seeing them as inferior and lacking in learning potential. Barbara Comber's reference in her research to the use of popular texts like postcards and newspapers and her comment in interview that 'early childhood is still dominated by picture book literacies' highlight the diversity of texts that are legitimate, but underused, sources in the critical literacy classroom.

Before developing this point further it is worth clarifying what we mean by popular culture. In their recently published book on the topic, Marsh and Millard (2000: 20) defined it as follows:

Children's popular culture overlaps with that of adults in that the broad fields into which it can be categorized are similar: music, sport, computers and related merchandise, books, magazines, television and film. However, children's popular culture also incorporates such diverse artefacts as toys, games, comics, stickers, cards, clothing, hair accessories, jewellery, sports accessories, oral rhymes, jokes, word play and even food and drink.

So popular culture is not merely texts, it also includes artefacts. Moreover, all these texts and artefacts are often connected by common themes. Marsh and Thompson (2001) demonstrate this with reference to the intertextual world of Pokémon. They point out that children only need to have one feature of the world of Pokémon to participate in the narrative – a packet of Pokémon stickers, for example, will allow the owner to take part in the narrative even though they may not have seen the Pokémon television programme or played the Pokémon computer game. Popular culture's intertextuality and links with children's immediate interests probably explain its appeal to a wide range of ages and classes.

Jackie Marsh argues that children's motivation to engage with texts that connect with their popular cultural interests should be much more fully explored and exploited in the classroom. She outlined the value of comic reading in her discussion of Stephen while her research with Elaine Millard (Millard and Marsh 2001) on a home-school comic lending study showed how such material from popular culture drew in the support of fathers and older brothers in the reading practices of the younger members of the

household. The use of popular media to enhance children's literacy skills appears to work because it involves drawing on learners' values, passions and identifications – ones that emerge in home and community life. Jackie likened Stephen to a child described by Deborah Hicks (2001), a boy who became increasingly distanced from school literacy because he saw little or no connection between the literacy practices valued by the school and the things and ways of being he most valued at home.

Apart from the advantages of building generally on out-of-school literacy experiences and resources and of involving family members not traditionally associated with supporting younger family members' literacy development, the use of popular culture to enhance literacy has very specific merits. For example, television and film provide opportunities to enhance understanding of narrative structures while watching and rewatching videos fosters familiarity with the language of books (Marsh and Thompson 2001).

Mary Hilton also emphasized this point in discussing how children increasingly acquire understanding of inference via televised texts and do not depend solely on print texts for this skill. What these literacy scholars are recommending here is that teachers recognize what print and televised texts have in common, i.e. both involve meaning making as a central process. And they advocate that classroom practices build on children's already quite sophisticated understanding of televised texts to promote a wider range of literacy skills.

Critical literacy includes critical media literacy. The latter is about creating communities of active readers and writers who can be expected to exercise some degree of agency in deciding what textual positions they will assume or resist as they interact in complex social and cultural contexts (Alvermann *et al.* 1999). In line with the accounts offered in Comber and Kempe above in relation to fiction and non-fiction texts, Anne Haas Dyson (1997) studied a primary classroom where the teacher encouraged children's knowledge of popular superheroes as contexts for literacy development. In this class, one group of girls responded to the boys' dominance of superhero play by writing new scripts that placed girls in powerful positions. Another primary teacher guided students to compare their perceptions of male and female superhero attributes, discuss reasons for those differences, and identify ways of changing those differences.

Jackie Marsh's study (2000) in an inner-city, north of England classroom of mainly working-class children, most of whom had English as an additional language, provides a fascinating account of the superhero play of 6- and 7-year-olds. In this project Jackie set up a socio-dramatic role-play area in the classroom – 'the Batman and Batwoman HQ'. The aim of her project was to encourage literacy practices in the role-play area and so in collaboration with the teachers a variety of literacy resources were placed within it. She then recorded the children's play in the area. This is how she describes the 'Bat cave' that was set up and the guidance that was given to the children:

The 'Bat cave' shared a space between two classes in an open-plan base. It was a small area, constructed from drapes and screens in order to produce a cavern-like effect. . . . The cave contained two desks, a computer, writing materials (notepads, pens, pencils, lined and unlined paper, two blank books labelled 'Batman's Diary' and 'Batwoman's Diary') and reading materials (maps, comics, messages, instructions). There was a dressing-up rack which contained homemade tabards, commercially produced Batman outfits, a cloak and a hat. Part of the way through the project a cardboard 'Batmobile' (the car used by Batman), which was made by the children, was placed in the cave. The children had contributed to the setting up of the cave, suggesting a range of resources for it and throughout the project they continued to produce new items to place in it (e.g. maps, radios).

When the cave was finally ready for its first superheroes, the children spent some time discussing the possibilities it offered. All the resources in the cave were introduced to them and suggestions were made by children, researcher and teachers as to their possible uses. . . . Before taking part in the role-play, the children spent some time discussing the Batman character and the types of activity engaged in by the characters in the television programmes and films they had seen. Extracts from a Batman film were watched and discussed. This was important in order to ensure that all children could engage with the discourse when playing in the cave. The 'Bat cave' was firmly introduced to the children as a place where both boys and girls could take on superhero identities and the sexist nature of some of the video extracts seen was discussed by the children. The children were clear that girls could be Batwoman. Throughout the project, the children were introduced to selected images and texts which portrayed women in an active role. . . . Apart from this prior groundwork, the children were given no specific instructions about what to do in the cave as it was a place for child-directed play.

Once attired in Batman or Batwoman regalia, all the children either engaged in imaginative play or sat down to write and read in role. Jackie discovered that, given the opportunity and the permission, girls engage in superhero play. They were eager to be superheroes, they resisted passive, onlooker roles. She noted 'The data contain images of girls flying about, jumping off chairs, driving Batmobiles and capturing villains' (2000: 22). She also concluded that for children to feel secure in taking on and experimenting with alternative roles and to challenge stereotypes, teachers need to intervene to create the conditions in which this can happen. This could involve explicit adult modelling for helping children play with given stories and characters. The publications of the scholars who were interviewed for this part of the book offer teachers strategies for such pedagogical work. Also Zipes

(1995) *Creative Storytelling* provides suggestions for the critical use of stories. Drawing on the work of Anne Haas Dyson (1998) we can conclude that the children in the classrooms described in this section are being offered opportunities to imagine new possibilities and new identities for themselves and each other as girls and boys, as children of different socio-economic and heritage backgrounds, and of varied bodily strengths.

Whatever teachers' responses, it is likely that media characters will remain a powerful influence on children's imaginative and social lives. Such characters are sustained, argues Dyson (1998), by 'powerful social desires, most especially the desire to belong'. By orchestrating children's diverse desires, teachers can make opportunities for not only developing reading and writing skills, but also for developing children's sense of what they can be and become. As Jackie Marsh's account above shows, teachers can also develop a sense of their own pedagogical power and the transformations they can inspire.

Influence of the socio-political perspective

A socio-political stance sees literacy not as neutral but as bound up with ethnicity, gender, social class, disability and so on. Its purpose is social justice, equality and democracy. It accepts that literacy is ideological so it involves decoding the ideological aspects of texts to establish whose interests are being served.

The history, emergence, and rationale of the National Literacy Strategy together with the highly prescriptive nature of its content and pedagogy (see Hall 2001 for a discussion) would suggest that it would be difficult to incorporate critical literacy practices into the curriculum and still remain true to its spirit. Drawing on the ideas of Bernstein, Jackie Marsh made the point in interview that when the curriculum is strongly classified in terms of content and strongly framed in terms of its delivery, as the NLS is, then opportunities for bringing in out-of-school literacy practices is more difficult. However, even if it does not explicitly encourage the kind of practices described above, it does not preclude them either. The emphasis throughout the Strategy on 'text-level work' and on developing children's interest (as well as skills) in reading suggests the potential for critical text analysis in a way that also includes popular media. Jackie discussed this in interview and talked about teachers who managed to blend popular culture into the requirements of the Strategy. In addition, to the extent that the kind of pedagogy advocated by those adopting a socio-political perspective on literacy encourages explicitness and is not opposed to direct instruction, showing, and strong teacher intervention, it is not inconsistent with the pedagogy of the NLS. In my view critically aware and conscientious teachers are not likely to ignore the perspectives discussed in this and previous parts of the book.

But they do need support and this needs to occur at the level of pre-service and in-service teacher education. Bearing in mind that critical literacy, in particular, is a relatively recent phenomenon in the primary pedagogical literature, it is not surprising that we do not yet have very many indications that its practice is widespread.

Countries outside the UK, however, have overtly embraced socio-political perspectives into their literacy frameworks. For example, versions of critical literacy are incorporated into the literacy syllabuses in most states in Australia. Alan Luke's four resources model, described above, has been adopted for use in the largest state in the country, New South Wales. In interview and in her research with Alan Luke and others (Luke *et al.* 1999) Barbara Comber expresses concern about the current shift in policy in Australia along more conservative lines. She suggests that official endorsement of critical literacy may not, unfortunately, be guaranteed in the future.

CONCLUSION

I will conclude by considering briefly some implications of the variety of reading perspectives discussed in the book. What the book demonstrates is that reading or literacy is not a simple matter; it is complex and multi-dimensional. Teaching reading is not a simple task and any teacher who thinks that any one model, scheme or programme will simplify this task or will suit all learners is grossly naïve. And even where there is a national framework in operation, such as the National Literacy Strategy, it remains the case that different teachers in different classrooms will mediate this in different ways and different children within the same teacher's classroom may well have very different experiences of what it is to 'do literacy'. Moreover, mandated programmes, no matter what their format, should not and, in some respects, cannot replace (even if they can constrain) the teacher's professional prerogative and intellectual freedom. Teachers need to be able to draw on research-based perspectives and ideas in order to make judicious choices about the particular teaching methods that suit their pupils. This is not to deny the importance of standards against which pupils can be judged at various stages in their schooling.

One explanation for the complexity of reading is the difficulty in responding to the diverse needs of learners in the classroom. This is why it is futile to search for a single right method for literacy development. This book is based on the premise that we should search for 'multiple perspectives', guided by the diverse needs of learners.

All eight scholars emphasized the need for Stephen to get better at decoding and comprehending text; all of them referred to the importance of the

purpose of reading for Stephen; all referred, albeit somewhat differently, to the social context of Stephen's literacy learning. The expert participants in this study all advocated the following: the integration of reading and other language modes; the provision of lifelike contexts and real purposes for reading; the building up of confidence and positive expectations about what literacy can do for his life; and the use of a variety of texts – not just fiction or picture books – so he develops an awareness of different functions of reading. They advocated the explicit teaching of skills within a context of their application for meaningful purposes. They also advocated shifting the focus from oral reading and reading as a performance – with all the stress that that entails for a struggling reader like Stephen – to silent reading and the application of what is read.

I think the term 'principled eclecticism' (Stahl 1997) is applicable to all our scholars in that they described and justified their interpretation of Stephen's literacy needs with reference to evidence and theory. They drew on more than one perspective and advocated the use of more than one instructional approach for the development of Stephen's literacy competence. It is clear that no one teaching approach is 'best'. Reading is not decoding, yet decoding is an integral part of reading and children need to master decoding as part of learning to read. Moreover, some direct teaching is necessary to learn about the different orthographic patterns of the English language. But that's a narrow notion of what literacy is. Adopting a broader notion of reading requires teachers to use a broader range of teaching strategies from direct explanation and explicit teaching which involve high control on the part of the teacher to modelling, scaffolding, facilitating, guided participating, and participating which involves decreasing control by the teacher and increased activity on the part of the learner.

However, there were significant differences in how different scholars emphasized aspects of reading. For example, one could argue that Laura Huxford's analysis of Stephen's needs would suggest that her cognitive-psychological take on reading is one that sees reading as value-free, autonomous and very much about skills. There is the assumption that literacy is a neutral technology that can be applied to different literacy demands in everyday life. On the other hand Laura also drew heavily on psycho-linguistic themes emphasizing Stephen's personal response and expression.

For several other scholars, e.g. Jackie Marsh, Henrietta Dombey and Barbara Comber, 'how' skills are to be learned is what is significant. In other words, the question for them is 'What's going on around literacy?' They operate on the assumption that what is important is that children are learning how to participate in the social activities of their classroom – they form a community of learners. What teachers and children do together is what is important. The quality of the interaction is vital since children are assumed to learn far more than they are taught. Their notion of reading is bound up with the context in which text interactions occur and they are

concerned with ways of making meaning with and around texts. Reading for them cannot be separated from writing, listening and speaking or from motivations, purposes, attitudes and ways of acting and interacting.

Socio-cultural and socio-political perspectives on literacy see the acquisition of school literacy practice (or any school practice) as inseparable from learners' motivations to identify with that practice. Both these perspectives hold to the principle that learners must see for themselves the value in what they are being asked to learn. They must believe it is useful to their lives. Young children are not learning to read but they are getting enculturated into a range of literacy practices, where each one is linked to specific forms of language, specific activities and specific identities (Gee 1999b). And as James Gee reminds us, one can easily fall in school by getting any or all of language, activity, and identity 'wrong'. It is for this reason that it is dangerous to assume that by attending to just one, albeit important, aspect of literacy (say phonemic awareness) one can overcome a particular child's literacy difficulties. Knowing literacy or becoming a reader is a matter of being able to participate in a community of literacy practitioners and being able to use the tools and technologies characteristic of that particular community. And learning is a matter of changing and acquiring new patterns of participation with corresponding changes in identity (Barton and Hamilton 2000).

In my view Luke's model (2000) is extremely helpful and provides an excellent summary of all the elements that need to be part of a literacy curriculum. As already noted, he talks about children as

- 1 *Code breakers* (How do I crack this code?).
- 2 *Meaning makers* (How do the ideas represented in the text string together?).
- 3 *Text users* (What do I do with this text, here and now?).
- 4 *Text critics* (What is this text trying to do to me?).

But what is important is that children do not begin with code breaking and move in a linear way through the four, only becoming a text critic once decoding, comprehension and application have been established. All four aspects are relevant and essential from the beginning of a child's literacy learning – although different ones will be differently emphasized in various lessons and all four can be developed using a range of teaching methods. In my view this model offers an excellent framework for evaluating the emphases of current classroom literacy curricula as well as current policy nationally.

But what use are the various perspectives presented in this book? What is one to do with them? I think their value lies in the fact that while different perspectives can be described as though they are fixed, they can be used – indeed have to be used – as though they are not fixed. The point is that one cannot urge that a particular perspective be followed faithfully in all situations for all learners all of the time. If one were to do this, then the message to

professional literacy educators is that power lies with the perspective, not with the teacher (Duffy 1997). Teachers would be expected to abdicate to the perspective, the programme or the model.

In my view the four major perspectives on offer here are valuable because they invite literacy educators to develop their own literacy stance, combining and adapting principles from different literacy positions. Teachers so informed are likely to demonstrate an enlightened or principled eclecticism in their own teaching practices (Duffy 1997). Such teachers are likely to be in control of the models of literacy they apply and are less likely to be controlled by any single version of literacy.

A knowledge of perspectives highlights the fact that it is futile to search for a solution to a fixed problem but, instead, what teachers have to do on a daily basis is design teaching and learning environments that fit the needs of specific children. They have to begin with children, not methods or resources or programmes. But what is inescapable is that how they interpret a given child's needs, how they define and address those needs, is profoundly shot through with ideas about learning, literacy, children, childhood, appropriate ways of behaving and interacting and so on. The extent to which they themselves are aware of this is a measure of their professionalism and sophistication as professionals, and the various reading perspectives analysed in this book attempt to raise that awareness.

There was agreement across the scholars on one point and that is the idea that learners have to understand and believe that reading is important for them in the here and now of their lives. The way they are taught conveys powerful messages to children about the types of learners they are assumed to be, and children tend to accept these judgements unquestioningly. Similarly, the way they are taught reading conveys to them powerful messages about what reading is and what it is good for. Barbara Comber poses an insightful question for class teachers and to me this is a useful thought on which to end. She asks 'If you only knew about literacy from being in this classroom what would you think it was for?'

APPENDIX

Bear by Mick Inkpen, published by Hodder, 1997

A small whoosing sound.

Then a plopl!

A bounce.

And a kind of squeak.

That was how the bear landed in my baby sister's playpen.

Have you ever had a bear fall out of the sky, right in front of you?

At first I thought he was a teddy bear.

He just lay there, crumpled on the quilt.

Then he got up and took Sophie's drink.

And her biscuit.

That's when I knew he was real.

The bear climbed out of the playpen and looked at me.

He rolled on his back, lifted his paws and growled.

He seemed to want to play.

I put him in Sophie's baby bouncer.

He was very good at bouncing, much better than Sophie.

I sneaked the bear into the house under the quilt. At bedtime I hid him among my toys.

'Don't you say anything Sophie!' I said. 'I want to keep this bear.'

Sophie doesn't say much anyway. She isn't even two yet.

In the morning the sound of shouting woke me up.

'Sophie, that's naughty!' It was Mum.

She was looking at the feathers.

'Sophie! That's very naughty!'

She was looking at the scribble.

Then she looked at the potty.

'Sophie!' she said. 'Good girl!'

But I don't think it was Sophie.

I'm sure it wasn't Sophie.

It definitely wasn't Sophie.

I took the bear to school in my rucksack.

Everyone wanted to be my friend.

'Does he bite?' they said.

'He doesn't bite me,' I said.

'What's his name?' they said.

'He doesn't have one.'

We kept him quiet all day feeding him our lunches. He liked the peanut butter sandwiches best.

After school my friends came to the house.

'Where is he?' they said.

We played with the bear behind the garage.

We made a tunnel . . . a bridge . . . and a jump!

When the car came back the bear had gone. We looked and looked but there was no bear anywhere.

At bedtime Sophie wouldn't go to sleep.

She didn't want her elephant.

She didn't want her rabbit.

She threw them out of the cot.

I gave her my second best pig.

She threw it out.

'Sophie! That's naughty!', said Mum.

But Sophie just howled.

She wanted the bear.

CRASH! BANG!

It was the middle of the night.

SMASH! CLANG!

The noise was coming from the kitchen. We crept downstairs and peeped through the door.

It wasn't a burglar.

'Bear! said Sophie. 'Naughty!'

So today a serious man in a serious hat came to look at our bear. He wrote something in a big black book.

'Will you have to take him away?' I said.

'We nearly always do,' said the man.

He pointed his pen at my bear.

'But,' he said, 'this bear is an Exception.'

'This bear,' he went on, 'has fallen quite unexpectedly into a storybook.'

And it is not up to me to say what should happen next.'

'So can we keep him?'

I said.

'Ask them,' he said.

And he pointed straight out of the picture at YOU!

And you thought for a moment.

You looked at the man.

You looked at the bear.

You looked at Sophie.

You looked at me.

And then you said . . .

'YES YOU CAN!'

So we did.

Have you ever had a bear fall out of the sky right in front of you?

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